

Lee, Eung Hyun (c. 1867–?)

KUK HEON LEE

Kuk Heon Lee graduated from Sahmyook University (B.A.), Newbold College (M.A.), and Sahmyook University (Ph.D.). From 1990 to 2009, he served as a pastor at Korean Union Conference. In 2010, he joined Sahmyook University as a lecturer and professor at the Theology Department. His research and teaching interests are in Church History. He wrote several books and published several papers on the subject. Currently, he is also the Dean of Planning at Sahmyook University.

One of the first Koreans to become an Adventist, Eung Hyun Lee, was baptized by Kuniya Hide in Kobe, Japan, in 1904.

Background

Eung Hyun Lee was a native of Yangdeok, South Pyongan province, Korea. He was born about 1867.

He immigrated to Hawaii after being baptized in Kobe, Japan, and no additional records were left, so nothing is known about him as a person. Nevertheless, he was an historical figure who became the first Korean Adventist.

Baptism

Eung Hyun Lee moved his family to Kobe, Japan, in 1904, when he was about 37 years old, through an Hawaiian immigration company located in Wonsan. In Kobe, he and his family waited for a ship to Hawaii after undergoing immigration procedures, including physical examinations.¹ On May 1, 1904, Lee, who was a Methodist, was walking around downtown Kobe, saw a sign at an Adventist Church, and paced back and forth at the door.

The Kobe Adventist Church was founded in January 1904 and the preacher, Kuniya Hide, was in charge.² Pastor Kuniya invited Eung Hyeon Lee, who was standing at the door, into the church and shared with him the message of the Adventist Church. They could not communicate verbally because they spoke different languages. Yet,



Eung Hyun Lee (right) and Heung Jo Son (left), who became the first members of the Seventh-day Adventists in Korea, 1904.

Photo courtesy of Kuk Heon Lee.

because both knew how to read and write Chinese characters, they communicated through writing.³ Eung Hyeon Lee visited Pastor Kuniya every day to study the message of the Adventist Church. He was scheduled to depart from Kobe to Hawaii on May 19. However, he suddenly suffered from an eye infection and was delayed for another 20 days.⁴ During this period, he and Heung Jo Son went to the Kobe Adventist Church to study with evangelist Kuniya and S. A. Lockwood, director of the Japanese Sanitarium.⁵ Eung Hyun Lee worshiped and studied the Bible at the Kobe church all day on Sabbath, June 11, the day before leaving for Hawaii. After studying the Bible until late into the night, he and Heung Jo Son were baptized at Nunobiki Falls, in the mountain behind the church, at dawn on June 12. He became the first Korean to be baptized into the Adventist Church.⁶

Immigration to Hawaii

Eung Hyeon Lee left Kobe on the Gaelic Ferry on the evening of June 12, 1904, the day of his baptism, and arrived in Honolulu, Hawaii, on June 25, 13 days later. Eung Hyun Lee, who immigrated with his family, sent a letter to Kuniya with the update that he was doing well in his religious life.⁷ However, after this letter, the contact was cut off, and no more was heard from him. In 1904, when Eung Hyun Lee moved to Hawaii, the Adventist mission in Hawaii was minimal. The Honolulu church in Hawaii was established in 1888, but the members soon scattered, and then the church reorganized in 1896. The Honolulu church was built in 1905, but it seems that the number of members was not large. Almost no Adventist mission took place in other regions. At that time Hawaiian sugarcane immigrant workers scattered and settled in Hashii Island (1,525), Oahu Island (1,024), Kauai Island (873), Maui Island (728), Lanai Island (7), and Molokai Island (6), but it is not known where Eung Hyun Lee settled.⁸ It is presumed that Eung Hyun Lee lived as an immigrant worker on one of these islands and died from an illness while living a solidarity religious life because there was no Adventist church.⁹

SOURCES

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Lee, Yung Lin. *The History of the Korean Adventist Church in the America, 1904-2006*. Korean SDA Church Council of America, 2011.

Oh, Man Kyu. *History of One Hundred Years of Korean SDA, 1904-1945*. Seoul: Korean Publishing House, 2010.

Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook. Takoma Park: The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1904.

NOTES

1. Kuniah Hide, "The Last Time Gospel in Korea," *Church Compass*, June 1887, 7.
2. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Takoma Park: The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1904), 74.
3. Since Korea and Japan belonged to the Chinese character culture, they could read and write Chinese characters.
4. Yung Lin Lee, *The History of the Korean Adventist Church in the America, 1904-2006* (Korean SDA Church Council of America, 2011), 12.
5. *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1904), 101.
6. Man Kyu Oh, *History of One Hundred Years of Korean SDA, 1904-1945* (Seoul: Korean Publishing House, 2010), 57.
7. F. W. Field, "Japan," *ARH*, February 2, 1905, 7.
8. Duk Hee Lee, *One Hundred Years of Korean Immigration in Hawaii* (Seoul: Joongang M&B, 2003), 31.
9. Yung Lin Lee, 37.

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